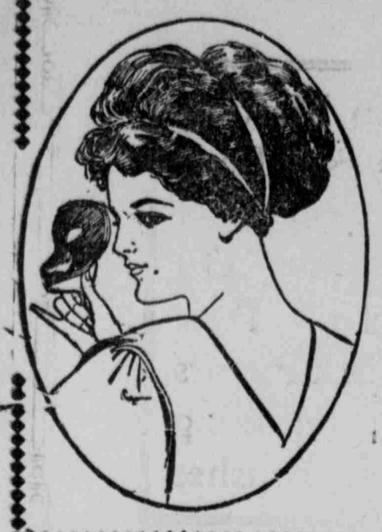
# The Lure of the Mask



By HAROLD MAC GRATH



CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT MERRIHEW FOUND.

THE great ship had passed the isle of Ischia, and now the bay of Naples unfolded all its variant beauties. Both he and Merrihew were foremost in the press against the forward rail. To the latter's impressionable mind it was like a dream—yonder, the temples and baths of Nero of the golden house; thither, the palaces of the grim Tiberius; beyond, Pompeii, with Glaucus, Ione and Nydia, the blind girl. The dream picture faded, and the reality was no less fascinating—the white sails of the fishermen winging across the sapphire waters, leaving ribboned pathways behind; proud white pleasure yachts, great vessels from all ports in the world, and an occasional battleship, drab and stealthy, and the hundred pink and white villages, the jade and amethyst of the islands, the ruined temples, the grim giant ash heap of Vesuvius.

"See that village on the cliffs toward the south?" asked Hillard. "That's Sorrento, where I was born. Sh! Look at Giovanni!"

Merrihew looked at the old Roman. Tears were running down his cheeks, and his gaze strove to pierce the distance to the faroff Sabine hills. Italy! Hillard leaned over and touched him on the arm, and he started.

"Take care, Giovanni."

"Pardon! I am weak this day, but tomorrow I shall be strong. Seven years! Have you not longed for it yourself? Has not your heart gone out many times across the seas to those cliffs?" pointing to Sorrento.

"Many times, Giovanni. But remember and control yourself. Presently the carabinieri will come on board. You will see that all our luggage goes promptly to the Bristol once we are through the customs."

"Trust me, signor."

They landed at the custom house at 2 in the afternoon and passed without any difficulty.

Hillard obtained rooms pleasantly situated looking out upon the sparkling bay. Giovanni began at once to unpack the trunks, happy enough to have something to occupy him till after dark, when he determined to venture forth. The dreaded carabinieri had paid him not the slightest attention. So far he was as safe as though he were in New York.

It was yet so early in the day that the two young men sallied forth in quest of light adventure. Besides, Merrihew was very eager to find some Roman and Florence newspapers. The American Comic Opera company was somewhere north. They found stationed outside the hotel a rosy cheeked cabby who answered to the name of Tomasso, or Tomass, as the Neapolitans generally drop the finals. He carried a bright red lap robe and blanket, spoke a little English and was very proud of the accomplishment. He was rather disappointed, however, when Hillard bargained with him in his own tongue. Tomass shook his fingers under Hillard's nose, and Hillard returned the compliment. Finally Tomass compromised on 1 lira 50 centesimi (30 cents) per hour, with 50 centisimi (10 cents) as a pourboire (tip). Crack, crack! Down the hill they went, as if a thousand devils were after them.

"By George," gasped Merrihew, clutching his seat, "the fool will break our necks!"

Tomass grinned and cracked his whip. He did not understand the word slowly in his own tongue or in any other, at least not till he reached the shops. A dozen times on the Via Roma Merrihew yelled that they would lose a wheel. But Tomass knew the game.

Merrihew had never seen such shops. Coral, coral wherever the eye roamed—where did they get it all, and to whom did they sell it? Necklaces, tiaras, rings, brooches, carved and uncarved—were there women enough in the world to buy these things?

"If I had a wife"— he began.

"Well?"

"I'd feel devilish sorry for her husband at this moment."

"But isn't the color great?" said Hillard. It was good to be in Naples again.

"I never saw so many kids," Merrihew finally observed, "so many dirty ones," he added. "Herod would have had his work cut out for him here. Now where can we get some newspapers? I must know where she is."

At the bookshop in the piazza they found the Rome and Florence papers. Hillard went through them thoroughly, but nowhere did he see anything relative to the doings of the American Comic Opera company.

"Not a line, Dan."

"But there must be something in the Florence paper. They should be playing there yet."

"Nothing. These papers are two weeks old."

Merrihew stared blankly at the sheet. "I should like to know what it means."

"We will write to the consulate in Rome. If there has been any trouble he will certainly notify us. I'll write tonight. Now, here's Cook's next door. We'll ask if there is any mail for Kitty Killigrew."

But there wasn't, nor had there been, and the name was not on the forwarding books.

"Looks as if your Kitty were the needle in the haystack."

"Cut it!" savagely. Pictures and churches and museums were all well enough, but Merrihew wanted Kitty Killigrew above all the treasures of earth.

When they turned down to the Via Caracciolo, with the full sweep of the magnificent bay at their feet, Merrihew's disappointment softened somewhat. It was the fashionable hour. The band was playing near by in the Villa Nazionale. Americans were everywhere. Occasionally a stray princess or countess flashed by inert and listless against the cushions and invariably overdressed. And when men accompanied them the men (if they were husbands) lolled back, even more listless. And beggars of all sorts and descriptions besieged the "very great grand rich Americans."

They were nearly a week in Naples. They saw the galleries, the museums and churches; they saw underground Naples; they made the weary and useful ascent of Vesuvius, and Merrihew added a new smell to his collection every hour. Pompeii by moonlight, however, was worth a thosand ordinary dreams, and Merrihew, who had abundant imagination, but no art with which to express it, happily or unhappily, saw Lytton's story unfold in all its romantic splendor.

They lingered at Amalfi three days and dreamed away the hours under the white pergola. Merrihew was loath to leave, but Hillard was for going on to Sorrento, for which his heart was always longing.

A spring rain fell as they took the incline, and it followed them over the mountains and down into Sorrento. They finally drew up in the courtyard of the Hotel de la Sirena, and the long ride was at an end. The little garden was white and pink with roses and camellias, and the tubbed mandarins were heavy with fruit.

"And this is March," said Merrihew, his thought traveling back to his own bleak country, where winter is so long and summer is so short.

Their rooms were on the northeast corner, on the first floor, and from the windows they could look down upon the marina piccola and the tideless sea, a sheer 150 feet below. Everybody welcomed the Signor Hillard. The hotel was his and everytning and everybody in it.

Later, when they were alone, Hillard began to explain.

"They remember my father. He used to live like a prince in Sorrento. Every time I come here I do the best I can to keep the luster to his name. Tomorrow I shall point out to you the villa in which I was born. A Russian princess owns it now."

"A real live princess!" said Merrihew. "Is she beautiful?"

"Once upon a time," returned Hillard, laughing.

Giovanni did not return till late that night, and on the morrow Hillard questioned him.

"I have been to see a cousin," said Giovanni, "who lives on the way to El Deserta."

"Ah! So you have a cousin here?"

"Yes, signor."

How old he looked, poor devil! Hillard had not taken particular notice of him during the past week's excursions. Giovanni had aged ten years since they landed.

"And was this cousin glad to see you? And is he to be trusted?"

"Both, signor. He had some news. She—the girl—is a dancer in a Paris cafe."

"Would you like me to give you the necessary money to go to Paris and bring her back to the Sabine hills?" Hillard asked softly.

"I shall go to Paris, signor—after."

"What is his name?" Hillard had never till this moment asked this question.

"I know it. That is sufficient. He is high, signor, very high, yet I shall reach him. If I told you his name"—

"There would be the possibility of my warning him."

"That is why I hesitate."

"You are a Catholic, Giovanni."

Giovanni signified that he was.

"Does not the God of all Catholics, of all Christians, in fact—does he not say that vengeance is his and that he will repay?"

"But there are so many of us, signor, so many of us small and of slight importance, that, likely enough, God, with all his larger cares, has not the time to remember us. What may happen to him in the hereafter does not concern me, for he will certainly be in the purgatory of the rich and I in the purgatory of the poor. It must be now, now!"

"Go your own way," said Hillard, dismissing him. "I shall never urge you again."

Giovanni gone, Hillard leaned against the casement. The sun was bright this morning, and the air was clear. He could see Naples distinctly. Below, the fishermen and their wives, their bare feet plowing in the wet sands, were drawing in the nets, swaying their bodies gracefully.

And then Merrihew burst in upon him wildly excited and flourished the hotel register.

"Look at this!" he cried breathlessly. He flung the book on the table and pointed with shaking finger.

Hillard came forward, and this is what he saw:

Thomas O'Mally
James Smith
Arthur Worth
La Signorina Capricciosa
Kitty Killigrew
Am. Comic Opera Co., N. Y.

"Kitty has been here!"

"Perfectly true. But I wonder"—

"Wonder about what?" asked Merrihew.

"Who La Signorina Capricciosa is. Whimsical, indeed. She must be the mysterious prima donna."

Hillard studied the easy flowing hand and ran his fingers through his hair thoughtfully.

"What is it?" asked Merrihew curiously.

"I am wondering where I have seen that handwriting before."

Another fortnight found the pair back in Naples after spending a week on Capri. At the hotel they found a batch of mail. There was a letter which held particular interest to Merrihew. It was from the consul at Rome, a reply to Hillard's inquiries regarding the American Comic Opera company.

"We'll now find out where your charming Kitty is," Hillard said, breaking the seal.

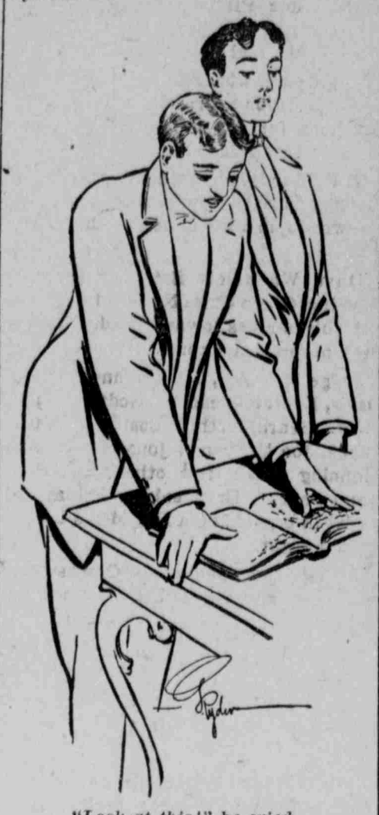
But they didn't. On the contrary, the writer hadn't the slightest idea where the play actors were or had gone. They had opened a two weeks' engagement at the Teatro Quirino. There had been a good house on the opening night. The remainder of the week did not show the sale of a hundred tickets. The American manager had shown neither foresight nor common sense, and his backer withdrew his support. The percentage demanded by the managers in Florence, Genoa, Milan and Venice was so exorbitant (although they had agreed to a moderate term in the beginning) that it would have been nothing short of foolhardiness to try to fill the bookings. The singing of the prima donna, however, had created a highly favorable impression among the critics, but she was unknown. The writer also advised Mr. Hillard not to put his money in any like adventure.

"That's hard luck," growled Merrihew, who saw his hopes go down the horizon.

"But it makes me out a pretty good prophet," was Hillard's rejoinder. "The angel's money gave out. Too many obstacles. To conquer a people and a government by light opera—it can't be done here. And so the American Comic Opera company at the present moment is vegetating in some little boarding house waiting for money from home."

Merrihew gnawed the end of his cane. All his pleasant dreams had burst like soap bubbles. Had they not always done so? There would be no jaunts with Kitty, no pleasant little excursions, no little suppers after the performance. And what's a Michelangelo or a Titian when a man's in love?

"Brace up, Dan. Who knows? Kitty may be on the high seas—that is, if she has taken my advice and got a return ticket. I'll give you a dinner at the Bertolini tonight, and you may have the magnum of any vintage you like. We'll have Tomass drive us down the Via Caracciolo. It will take some of the disappointment out of your system."



*"Look at this!" he cried.*

They had ridden up and down the Via Caracciolo twice when they espied a huge automobile, ultramarine blue. It passed with a cloud of dust and a rumble which was thunderous. Hillard half rose from his seat.

"Somebody you know?" asked Merrihew.

"The man at the wheel looked a bit like Sandford."

"Sandford? By George, that would be jolly!"

"Perhaps they will come this way again. Tomass, follow that motor."

Sure enough, when the car reached the Largo Vittoria it wheeled and came rumbling back. This time Hillard had no doubts. He stood up and waved his arms. The automobile barked and groaned and came to a stand.

"Hello, Sandford!"

"Jack Hillard, as I live, and Dan Merrihew! Nell," turning to one of the three pretty women in the tonneau, "what did I tell you? I felt it in my bones that we would run across some one we knew."

"Or over them," his wife laughed.

When we meet an old friend in a foreign land, one who has accepted our dinners and with whom we have often dined, what is left but to fall on his neck and weep? There was, then, over this meeting much ado with handshaking and compliments, handshaking and questions, and, as in all cases like this, every one talked at once—how was old New York, how was the winter in Cairo, and so forth and so on—till a policeman politely told them that this was not a private thoroughfare and that they were blocking the way. So they parted, the two young men having promised to dine with the Sandford party that evening.

"What luck, Dan!" Hillard was exuberant.

"Saves you the price of a dinner."

"I wasn't thinking of that. But I shall find out all about her tonight."

"Who?"

"The lady in the fog, the masquerading lady!"

To be continued



**To Cook Cereals Perfectly.**

To cook oatmeal or any kind of cereal as thoroughly as it needs to be cooked requires more time than can usually be given in our hurried breakfast getting, and not all of us are blessed as yet with a fireless cooker to do the work overnight.

So the best substitute is to put the cereal on the stove at supper time, let it come to a good boil, then turn the fire out and leave it in that same spot until breakfast time without lifting the lid. The heat already generated will finish cooking the grains so that all that needs to be done in the morning is to stir it from the bottom, add a little water possibly and reheat for serving.

Of course the vessel must be of crockery, enamel (in which there are no breaks) or aluminium for the food to be left in it so long, and the lid must be as tight as possible to retain the steam which does so much of the work. But this method is a great time and gas saver, and the cereal is much more digestible than when cooked by quick boiling. It is the fireless cooker idea applied to common utensils.



**Notice.**

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned, William L. McCracken, now confined in the penitentiary, at Eddyville, Ky., will make application to the Board of Prison Commissioners for a parole. Said application will be made on May 3, 1910, at the office of said commissioners in Frankfort, Ky., at 2 o'clock p. m. on said date.

Witness my hand this 8th day of April, 1910. W. L. McCracken.